

# The Mind's Eye

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## Soccer in a Puddle of Water

**I**NVESTIGATORS for the special commission are reported to have taken test borings of a playground at one state college. The field was supposed to be underlaid with six to nine inches of gravel, but the borings showed no gravel was there." This item appeared in a *Boston Globe* story March 17 summarizing some details to be disclosed in the public hearings (now in progress) of the Special Commission Concerning State and County Buildings, a legislatively appointed body which has been investigating corruption and fraud in Massachusetts construction programs for more than a year.

The state college is North Adams. The "playground" is its soccer field where, in the gathering darkness of a cold, muddy afternoon in 1978, the North Adams State College soccer team won the New England Division III Championship. A long trail of tears led to the opening of the field that fall, but it was as nothing compared to the flood of lamentations that followed. Behind the stands the spectator could note an open pool of water, close enough to jump into, a foot or so below the level of the playing surface. It was the water table. The autumn rains came and, having no place to go, stood on the field. Games were ruined. Somehow North Adams kept winning, perhaps because they were used to sloshing around. But it was an embarrassment to bring good teams like Babson and Brandeis onto that damp field of battle. What would they think? That they didn't get a fair shake, obviously. Nor did our own athletes—one of whom, despite all, was the leading scorer in the United States that year and came ever so close to a new national record.

**L**IKE every other institution of learning, North Adams has a library. It was completed in 1970. Two-thirds of its study stations are on the top floor. For ten years students have worn out the stairs coming down to tell the person in charge that it's "cold up there." The person in charge is sympathetic, and secretly despairing. Nothing can be done about it. The heating system does not respond to adjustment. It wasn't, apparently, built right. Ultimately good-natured with the resilience of youth, the students graduate anyway and go on to pursue fruitful lives. But what are their memories of their college's library? Cold.

Cold, too, will be their assessment of the Commonwealth's concern for them as they open the newspaper these next three months and read the sorry tale of graft on whose altar they and their fellows in public higher education were sacrificed: the \$11 million power plant that doesn't work, the unsafe library waiting four years to be occupied, the parted walls, leaking roofs, falling bricks. Warm memories and gratitude sustain the body of alumni,

bring them back to their college, open their pocketbooks, prompt them to spread the good word. Doughty, indeed, is the North Adams graduate who transcends the feeling of having been cheated by venal men in government and keeps up the old school tie nonetheless.

And cold are their thoughts about the niggardliness of their treatment at the hands of the legislature in other respects—the lack of educational equipment and materials, the dearth of scholarships, the plain unconcern, even contempt, they have endured. The lordliness of it all would depress the most earnest seeker after truth. Our mission is to give them a vision of the good society. Most of us were introduced to adulthood with a good educational experience, whether public or private; our memories are warm. We try to communicate this. But we do not altogether succeed because we, too, are wrestling with the Commonwealth and, if the truth be told, are skeptical of the interest of the People in the education of their children. If the citizens of Massachusetts will continue to sit still for the historic despoliations for which our state is disesteemed, the chance of an influx of grace is slim. But we can hope that the Great and General Court will come to understand that the young generation, its most precious resource, has been short-changed. Only fifteen years have passed since the Willis-Harrington Act charted a useful future for public higher education in Massachusetts. The promise of that well-intended legislation has been dimmed by a declining economy and political astigmatism alike. A sound system of higher education can survive the economy. But it cannot deal with the effects of corruption; to education, this is poison at the root.

**T**HE Special Commission Concerning State and County Buildings is chaired by John William Ward, a historian and the former president of Amherst College, a man who knows what a good building, a playable athletic surface, and honor in educational governance are. He has already had to fight a hard (and successful) battle to keep the commission alive. Better than most, Mr. Ward will understand the cynicism which overtakes the academic community when those in public trust hold it hostage to self-interest; and, if we read him accurately, he will make a tenacious attempt to repair the morale as well as the buildings of the public universities, colleges, and community colleges of Massachusetts. Besieged by conflicting interests, he can depend on firm support from few in government because his commission's findings will touch so many, from top to bottom. We who have a large stake in his enterprise think of him kindly and wish him well. We could even write him a letter.

—Charles McIsaac

## Higher Education in the Coming Age of Limits

by Thomas A. Mulkeen

THE United States, the most productive nation in the history of the world, found its unique fertility in its vast wilderness. There, on the edge of the unknown, the Renaissance qualities of independence, self-reliance and initiative interacted with the individualism sanctified by the Protestant Reformation to create a nation unlike any before it, founded on democracy, capitalism, and the crucial work ethic. The merger of the ideal and the pragmatic along with the notion of progress, potential, and opportunity shaped the American character.

On the frontier, work would destratify society and lift men into the propertied class. Progress was the product of inventive industriousness; formal learning was secondary and condition of birth of small consequence. A strange and relentless environment conditioned Americans to deal with the unexpected, forcing them to break down traditional social and professional barriers. The profession of arms was borne, Indian-style, by whole communities of citizen soldiers. Backwoods fighting was highly individualistic warfare, without rules. The Indian was a skilled, courageous, often ruthless guerilla fighter. To survive, the colonist had to follow his example. European military etiquette disappeared, as did the distinction between officer and private and even between soldier and civilian. The military profession was only one of the European monopolies to be changed. The distinction of the British legal profession did not survive intact in the new world. The same was true of the medical profession. On the frontier the layman had to be prepared to act as lawyer, architect, and physician. The man who was not qualified to be a little bit of everything was not qualified to be an American.

Thus, the American dream was not initially dominated by academic achievement and the school credential. Indeed, the most striking characteristic of education in the colonial experience was how few individuals went to school. On the frontier social mobility was linked to work, not education. Knowledge was not transmitted by specialists concentrated in schools and universities, but through the family, religious institutions, and apprenticeships. Learners and teachers were dispersed throughout the

entire community. Vigorous young men invested their time in the world of work, not the classroom. Formal education was viewed as a postponement of the business of getting ahead. Thomas Jefferson's friend Benjamin Rush explained: "We occupy a new country. Our principal business should be to explore and apply its resources, all of which presses us to enterprise and haste. Under these circumstances to spend two or more years learning two dead languages is to turn our backs on a gold mine."

Harvard College was established in 1636, but it was 1800 before there were a dozen colleges in the United States. In a population of almost four million people at the time of the Revolution there were only 2,500 living college graduates. The paucity of institutions suggests their limited role. The handful of colleges were religious and elite in character. In pragmatic America a college education had a dual role: the Calvinist was committed to a learned clergy and a literate people; hence the function of the early colleges was to provide society with a supply of knowledgeable ministers, doctors, and lawyers. As the country moved westward, the nineteenth-century towns built their own colleges along with their grand hotels and opera houses. However, until after the Civil War the United States was a rural society composed in great part of farmers and shopkeepers aided by a scattering of college-educated professionals. Education at all levels was a small, fragmented enterprise with little societal impact.

THE link between schooling and a better job developed as the United States moved from a rural to an urban society and from an agrarian to an industrialized economy. Industrialization demanded skills that neither the family nor the church could provide. It was under this pressure, during the period 1850-1870, that higher education as we know it began to take shape. During the century of the American industrial revolution, roughly from 1850 to 1950, higher



education focused on the goal of turning out a new professional and managerial class. In this period education replaced the frontier in the center of the American dream. The university mirrored the society, teaching the ideas necessary to perpetuate American values. At the same time, the university began to model itself after the factory, producing each year hundreds, then thousands, of students with the latest accumula-

Professor Thomas A. Mulkeen spent last year in postdoctoral study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

tion of new knowledge and the intellectual skills to process and evaluate it. Higher education became a sophisticated means for channeling highly trained human resources into the system. In the process college became the highroad of upward mobility for the growing middle class. By the beginning of the twentieth century, formal schooling was widely accepted as the institution best able to provide the skilled manpower needed by the economic system. At the same time, the schools assumed the role of society's sorters, selectors, and certifiers. The schools bestowed society's approval on some young people, opening opportunities to further education that almost inevitably led to good jobs and higher social standing. Others were less fortunate. They were tracked off to vocational school to learn the occupations appropriate to the traits and attitudes of the working class. Higher education matched the rise of monopoly capitalism with a credential monopoly, as the school diploma increasingly became the singular repository of American mobility promises.

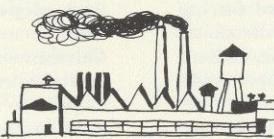
Tax-supported public education was to assist the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. The catalyst for this transformation came in 1862 with the passage of the Morrill Act establishing the land grant colleges. These new institutions emphasized the development of technical skills and the application of scientific principles to vocations in agriculture, industry, and commerce. The colleges were expected to assist the rapid industrialization of the United States through training and research related to the technical advance of manufacturing. Out of the land grant movement came scores of agriculture experiment stations and farm bureaus with extension agents to help farmers with their daily problems. Establishing the principle that a college education could encompass both a liberal arts component as well as practical training, the Morrill Act set the tone for the development of American higher education for the ensuing hundred years. The land grant spirit, the demand for regional usefulness and contemporary relevance, were viewed as expressions of democracy. No longer were colleges restricted to the upper classes as the emerging ideology promoted a system of higher education open to all young men of ability. In reality, both higher education and the federal government were keeping pace with the economic needs of the society they served.

Two great influences have molded the modern American university system. Both have come from sources outside the university. Both have come in response to public policy initiatives. The first federal initiative was the land grant movement, whose beginnings we have sketched. This kind of government

involvement continued in the years prior to World War I, when the land grant institutions extended their activities beyond their campus boundaries. The University of Wisconsin entered the legislative halls in Madison with reform programs, supported the trade union movement, and developed agriculture extension services to a greater extent than ever before. The University looked to serve the state and inculcate the reform principles of the Progressive movement. Other universities did likewise; even private institutions like Columbia and Chicago developed important extension programs. During World War I, campus-based R.O.T.C. programs were established to provide recruits for the officer corps. During the depression universities and colleges were involved in programs of the Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration. Always pragmatic, the American position for increased access to education was based not primarily in a desire for the development of the mind or pride in learning or culture for its own sake, but rather in the political and economic benefits accruing to the nation.

The second great federal initiative began with government support for scientific research during World War II, as universities participated heavily in various programs of war-related research. The war laboratories were the forerunners of continuing government-supported university research centers. After the war, the universities were to serve the scientific revolution. In the post-Sputnik era the federal government turned to educational institutions to close the perceived gap between American and Soviet technology.

From 1945 to about 1965 labor markets in the United States were elastic enough to absorb an ever-increasing supply of educated workers. In the post-World War II era higher education served as a buffer to keep large numbers of ex-soldiers off the unemployment lines while preparing them for a role in our industrial society. The GI Bill of Rights underscored the national recourse to public education for dealing with massive human power problems. Through the 1960s public policy was designed to increase the number of college graduates and to turn out teachers, engineers, and scientists in abundance. Investment in education was considered good for the economy and, therefore, good economic policy. In addition, social science research indicated that investment in education could bring about radical social change. It was argued that blacks and other minorities would achieve economic integration into the American mainstream by access to public education right through college. Public policy initiatives and federal money supported their access, and that of women and the handicapped, to higher education and white collar positions. As a result, the



*Hillside Cemetery  
North Adams*

*by Herschel Shohan*

Weathers,  
snows, the rain of Saturdays, Monday's rare sky  
out of bounds.

What is the end of this spatter of light,  
this flicker of syllables that recedes?

But for us it does not recede, this boundary.  
Sense and syntax counter, give weight and point to

This gesture, this posture, these random posts  
That gather our confusion, generating this hillside lean,  
This falling over, this odd-angled sowing.

Something wide seems pinned down here  
With stone pins. The marble and granite shafts  
To pierce something, though not the thing  
In pieces around us. Its signs are  
White words spoken and spoken  
Tablets with a finger-end  
Roundness, a blank kneeling angel on its stock signaling  
A transition dumb to a live ear, a music of possibilities

Going on.

### Going on

We lean toward a finickiness, fragile inve-

There's a solitude, meantime, that moves

Is moved

*Herschel Shohan is  
Assistant Professor of English.*

median number of years of school completed rocketed upward, and between 1952 and 1972 college enrollment expanded from 2.6 million to 8.4 million.

In the last hundred years the United States has become the richest nation on earth, striving to make good the promise to its immigrant people that their livelihood would be better and to its youth that the quality of life would improve. But no economic trends run on eternally. It is now becoming clear that the ever-expanding supply of educated workers is running up against a ceiling of job demand. Some observers have suggested that from an economic standpoint the value of an investment in a college degree has diminished. The world of work has undergone a far-reaching metamorphosis. The most striking change has been in the technical and managerial fields where new positions demand highly technical skills beyond the level

offered by most college programs. Our mature, complex economic system has become dependent on the technology we have developed. In less than half a century the airplane changed the rules of warfare, politics, and business. Only four decades separated Rutherford's discoveries in radioactive disintegration from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The first humans landed on the moon a short eight years after the first manned orbital flight around the earth. The new electronic, biological, nuclear, and solar technologies are dramatically altering our society.

The colleges and universities, part of the larger revolution that transformed our nation from an agrarian to an industrial power, are not now changing rapidly enough to keep pace with the technological age. The typical curriculum of the American college has not changed substantially since the turn of the century. Thus, at a time when education has consoli-

dated its role in training, socializing, and selecting the work force, the curriculum remains entrenched in the past. The impact of technology on the workplace, the changing circumstances of physical resources, the rise of new social expectations, and the dramatic new participation of women in the labor market have resulted in a disjuncture between what is expected in the workplace and what college graduates are prepared to do. Degrees become insignificant in a world in which skills are quickly outdated. The apparent inability of schooling to meet new training needs has led many employers to take on a larger share of the training function. Bell Telephone alone spends more than \$700 million a year on training, and a host of new institutions offering specialized training programs have been organized in recent years.

The American experience has been shaped by expansion. Our national development has rested on the premise of limitless supplies of low-cost energy. But the era of cheap energy—the Petroleum Age—is over and the frontier has closed. These two events, not yet fully perceived, are causing a fundamental shift in the psychology of the American people. As personal frontiers shut down, as possibilities and opportunities are limited and freedom of movement is curtailed, the deeply rooted viewpoints of Americans will be drastically modified. At the same time, the failure of many educated people to achieve their career goals and the diminishing ability of the educationally less favored to improve their position could produce a discouraged and disgruntled attitude in a large share of the population—with potentially dangerous consequences to the nation.

Historian Ray Billington has commented that we reached the upper limit of our high standard of living in the watershed decade of the 1970s and that we have already entered an evolutionary phase of reevaluation whose end is many years or decades, even as much as a century, away. One of the consequences may be an extension of governmental control as scarce resources dwindle and government is forced to use compulsion in order to meet its obligations. Already, businessmen and economists are insisting that the private sector demands faster capital formation, a process that diverts funds from consumers and social services and thus reduces both the standard of living and the quality of life.

**W**HAT does this mean for higher education? The colleges and universities are rapidly getting out of synchronization with a society profoundly troubled

by critical survival issues; where they once led, they now trail behind. The frequent incidence of mismatch between a worker's educational qualifications and his employment prospects will significantly alter people's attitudes toward the value of education for status and career advancement. Federal projections show a prospective surplus of some one million college graduates in relation to national economic needs. A Joint Economic Committee labor study released in 1978 predicted that the surplus will mean relatively few opportunities for new graduates through the year 2000. Hence, the decay of higher education's traditional role as social selector and certifier seems as inevitable as the continued growth of alternative routes to economic advancement.

What changes must necessarily be made if American higher education is to survive in some proximity to its present size? A society relying on high technology will require greater functional flexibility of virtually every American adult. This will demand of colleges and universities a new approach in the way students are prepared for professional careers. Learning how to learn will be progressively more important. Accordingly, students must expect to use the degree portion of their studies to acquire process skills rather than facts, and the curriculum must shift from a knowledge base to a process base. The "basics" cannot be an end in themselves but must be susceptible to explanation through a familiarity with the process. Nor can education cease with the granting of a degree: institutional and faculty resources will have to be committed to lifelong learning activities as academic institutions will be expected to offer opportunities for learning renewal to its graduates.

Serving adults in transition will work a fundamental transformation of the entire academic community. The adult requires pedagogic approaches quite different from those suitable to the traditional college student. The curriculum must be able to offer a series of individually articulated goals shaped to meet the needs of personal growth and professional redirection. At issue is the ability of the campuses to accommodate to a new set of learning requirements with a reorganized curriculum and new teaching methods.

Since the establishment of the land grant institutions, American higher education has pragmatically served the economic needs of society. As that society enters a period of deep change, the challenge to higher education is to move again into a position of leadership by addressing the problems of social transition in the postindustrial world.



# Robert Bishoff on films

Last Summer in Vietnam . . . North Carolina . . . Three Mile Island

**I**F THERE is a significant trend that can be noted in American movies at the turn of the decade, it seems to be found in a renewed and growing emphasis on subjects that deal with important sociopolitical concerns. *The Muppet Movie*, *Star Trek*, and Woody Allen's personal black and white version of *Manhattan* notwithstanding, the major works of 1979 have included a number of "contemporary issues" movies.

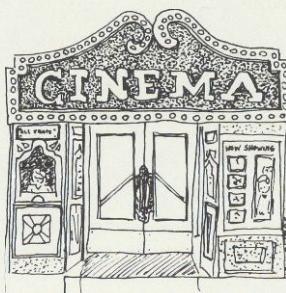
Among the more notable early examples of this trend are four movies that enjoyed an almost continuous screening over the last summer in the Berkshires. These films, *The Deerhunter*, *Coming Home*, *Norma Rae*, and *The China Syndrome* can be labeled as "contemporary American issues movies." Grouped into a body as they were this past summer, they invite and encourage one to seek commonalities among them. For me, this search resulted in some interesting and provocative observations about the current Hollywood approach to sociopolitical problems.

The compelling question which arises when these four films are collectively presented is what, if any, connection can be made between past wounds remembered of the Vietnam experience, present struggles and uncertainties regarding job satisfaction and financial security, and futuristic nightmares of nuclear disaster. Interestingly, the answer that emerges seems to rest in a reaffirmation of a traditional American approach to socio-political issues and problems. The quality that stands out most predominantly in *The Deerhunter*, *Coming Home*, *Norma Rae*, and *The China Syndrome* is a tendency to particularize and individualize public concerns. In each of these films the central issues may be collective and societal, but the conflicts, struggles, and ultimate solutions are personal and individual.

**I**SUPPOSE that the subject of the Vietnam conflict—or conflicts—might now be termed a "cold" issue in political terms, but it has, over the past year, become a "hot" subject for the movies. If nothing else, the summer screenings of *Coming Home* and *The Deerhunter* did probably warm us up a bit for the eventual arrival of Francis Ford Coppola's long delayed, highly publicized epic version of Vietnam as *Apocalypse*

Now. More than this, though, I think that together these two films did touch on something near to the heart of the legacy of the Vietnam experience, something more basic than a "cold" political issue. The plot of *The Deerhunter* is basically concerned with the effects of the experience of the Vietnam conflict on a group of young Pennsylvania steelworkers, and *Coming Home* deals with the aftermaths of the conflict on an embittered disabled veteran, a career military officer, and the woman who loved them both. More importantly, however, *The Deerhunter* and *Coming Home* are also about disintegration of community, severing of unions, loss of direction, and, finally, the individual in isolation. The style of the two films is a study in contrasts and provides apt analogies for the ways America — and American movies — tend too often to approach issues of general public concern. *The Deerhunter* is brash, sprawling, exciting, loud and ambiguous; *Coming Home* is "sincere." Neither approach does much more to create significant art than it does to make ideal politics, but as a substitute for real substance it has often been a mainstay of both. However, while the style of these two films is radically different, the conclusions presented by each are strikingly similar.

The result of the Vietnam experience in *The Deerhunter* is not the emergence of a viable ethnic community of Russian-American compatriots, but of a small band of individuals attempting to resubmerge themselves into their own vague concept of the larger American society. *Coming Home* does not conclude with the emergence of a fraternal order of paraplegic veterans or liberated housewives or displaced soldiers, but with three individuals confronting individual isolation. A perceptive colleague of mine remarked that the first hour of *The Deerhunter* reminded her of the strong sense of community fellowship conveyed in *Fiddler on the Roof*, but that she did not know what to make of that ending scene of a small band of frightened individuals joining voices in a verse of "God Bless America." Nor do I know what to make of it. Or, for that matter, do I know what to make of the ending of *Coming Home* when, as Luke addresses a group of high school students on the horrors of war, and a naked Bob walks out into the sea, Sally goes in the "OUT" door at the supermarket. But, maybe that is the point—maybe not knowing what to make of the collapse of old communities, of old directions, is what



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is a specialist in film and drama.

we find somewhere near the heart of the Vietnam legacy. If old communities and old directions have collapsed as these films suggest they have, then we are left with only the individuals who survive. What we make of that depends on who these individuals are. At the end of *Coming Home* and *The Deerhunter*, we don't know who they are for they don't know who they are.

IRONICALLY *Norma Rae*, a film which deals with the issue of unionization, creates its thematic substance through the very discovery and revelation of individual self-knowledge lacking in the two Vietnam films. Ostensibly *Norma Rae* is about the attempts of a textile union to organize in a small North Carolina town; in truth it is about an Eastern Jewish liberal union organizer awakening a sense of personal integrity and self-knowledge in a southern Protestant woman. In an interview after receiving the Cannes Best Actress Award for her performance as Norma Rae, Sally Field argued for this point, but went on to say that the film was, therefore, not a political statement. However, by traditional American definition, individuals are the very basis of the political structure, and the awakening of a sense of personal integrity and self-knowledge is a profound political act. The fact that *Norma Rae* is not about the textile union moving en masse into a small southern community to effect political change and social betterment nor even about the recruitment of a new member to the ranks of radical feminism is, consequently, precisely what makes it a traditional American political film. Like the other three films in the repertory, the central conflicts in *Norma Rae* are individual and personal; the movement is from naive innocence to bewildered awareness, and the conclusion relies on actions born of individual self-knowledge. The substance in *Norma Rae*—which, in contrast to *The Deerhunter* and *Coming Home*, is a small, quiet, unassuming film—comes about through the revelation of individual strength and assurance capable of withstanding changing directions and disintegrating communities. The climactic moment in the film is the image of a woman standing alone on a table in the center of a textile plant holding up a handpainted sign reading "UNION." That ironic and incongruous image is, I think, as effective a symbol of traditional American political philosophy as one might hope to find. Somewhere in that link between the solitary individual and union lies the basis of the American democratic experiment.

NOWHERE in these four films is there a better example of a reaffirmation of the American belief in individualism, however, than in *The China Syndrome*. The plot of *The China Syndrome* is, of course, concerned with what could have happened at Three Mile Island. (It is at the very least ironic that the film

was released before the accident occurred in Pennsylvania.) The central theme of the film, though, is introduced in an obvious way through a slip of the tongue early in the action as the news reporter portrayed by Jane Fonda refers to a nuclear power plant as an example of "selfish sufficiency" rather than the intended "self-sufficiency."

The final statement of the film seems to be that the greatest threat to traditional American political values is the possibility of self-sufficiency becoming "selfish sufficiency." If *The Deerhunter* and *Coming Home* are about the rediscovery of a need for individual self-sufficiency, and *Norma Rae* is about the creation of individual self-sufficiency, then *The China Syndrome* is about what to do and not to do with self-sufficiency. *The China Syndrome* is about the healthy ambition of genuine professionalism, about the effective will of a free press, about the importance of loyalty, about the value of friendship, about respect, and, most of all, about individual and personal moral integrity. The plot of *The China Syndrome* is not resolved by an aroused mass of enraged citizens rising up to overthrow the conscienceless capitalists but by individual moral righteousness, stone-fisted sincerity, and a strong sense of personal professionalism.

Since this plot resolution seems to rest in the reaffirmation of traditional American values, it is really not too surprising that it also sounds like the conclusion to a John Wayne movie. If the post-Vietnam era of directionlessness and individual isolation has created a new sort of frontier experience, then perhaps it is fair to draw some parallels between, say, the last five minutes of *Stagecoach* when John Wayne rights injustice and restores moral order with five quick shots from his carbine and the last five minutes of *The China Syndrome* when a lone news reporter armed with moral righteousness, professional integrity, and a television camera performs much the same feat. Perhaps I might even suggest that the torch has been passed, that the symbol of traditional American political thought which John Wayne's screen image became emerges once again in *The China Syndrome* in the unlikely person of Jane Fonda. It's a provocative thought, worthy of some intellectual and emotional consideration.

As other examples of this trend toward contemporary issues movies become evident, intellectual and emotional considerations continue to be provoked. Recent outstanding models of the art of film, such as *Apocalypse Now*, *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*, and *Kramer vs. Kramer* are, at their base, illustrative of the same traditional approach to issues as *The Deerhunter*, *Coming Home*, *Norma Rae*, and *The China Syndrome*. The perfect summation of the genre is expressed in *The Electric Horseman* when Jane Fonda, playing yet another well-armed newscaster, says, "I started out on this trip to get a news story but ended up following an individual man on a private destination toward a personal goal."